



**Episode 1x16:
"THE BIG STICK"**

**Written by
George W. Krubski
Edited by
Matt Engstrom**

**Head Writer Commentary by
George W. Krubski**

Producer: David Elmer
Head Writer: George W. Krubski
Art Director: Sean Young

Disclaimer: The crew of the Serenity, the 'Verse in which they live, and their fellow inhabitants are the property of Joss Whedon, Universal Studios, and/or Fox Television. They are used in this work of fan fiction with love and respect, but without permission.

Head Writer Commentary

Since this is our first commentary, I wanted to take a little time to talk about the project and our process before discussing the episode itself.

I can't speak for all other crew members, but my involvement with Virtual Firefly started on www.fireflyfans.net, a few weeks after the release of *Serenity*. While skimming the site, I found a thread discussing the idea of a virtual continuation of Firefly in which the story of the movie would be told as "Season Two." Conversation went on for a week or so, and then some of us finally said "Okay, we're doing this. Who's with us?" and a few days later, we were discussing what our approach to the project would be.

Although we initially thought of digging right into the second season, we instead decided to go back and finish Season One, bringing it to a full 22 episodes. We also knew very early on that we were going to do episodes in script format rather than prose. While some folks might prefer prose, we wanted this to feel as much like a true continuation of a television series as possible.

Very quickly, we started work on seven episodes of S1AIII, or "Season One, Act Three." Like many television shows, we took the approach that the season is broken into three acts or arcs. In the case of Firefly, "Act One" is all about introducing the characters, beginning with the pilot and ending with "Out of Gas" (in which we see how the crew came to be on board). "Act Two" focuses on the family growing closer, while also expanding the mystery of River. We begin with "Ariel" (in which Jayne admits that he wants to be part of the family) and end with "Objects in Space" (in which River is finally accepted).

We knew that we were beginning right after "Objects in Space" and would be ending with an adaptation of "Those Left Behind" (thanks to Joss Whedon, who gave us a brilliant season finale in comic book form), so we had six episodes to fill things in. Our finale would include Inara's departure, and Book's intention to leave, so we knew that our Act Three would have to lead up to that.

We knew that we wanted to resolve the unfinished business of the Lassiter, devote one episode to the return of a villain from the television series, and probably introduce Haven (which will play a more important role as a recurring set piece in Season Two), so a lot of the season was already shaping up. I'll get into how each episode of S1AIII came about in the

individual commentaries, but I wanted to underscore here that we the season was constructed very carefully from the beginning.

If you're actually still awake and reading after that little history lesson, I hope you'll stick with me through some commentary specifically about episode 1x16: "The Big Stick."

It took a little while before we figured out what our first episode was going to be about. We wanted it to feel familiar without feeling like it was a rip-off of one of the television episodes. We wanted to reintroduce the characters and basic concept to some extent, but also wanted to give the episode a hook without relying on the series too heavily by bringing in, say, a villain from the show.

The hook we were looking for became the introduction of Haven. Since we don't see much of Haven in the movie, I went to the novelization, which has a bit more detail, for some inspiration. Bernabe, Doane, Mildred (who shows up later this season), and Hiroku (we'll meet him in Season Two) are all referenced in the novel, and given very brief descriptions. Since Haven will, to some extent, become the crew's second home, we felt it was very important to introduce Haven early, and to make the good folk of Haven almost as interesting as our crew, and make them feel like folks who might, under other circumstances, have been on *Serenity* (for a while, I took to referring to the citizens of Haven as "the Tailies").

Once we had the hook of Haven, a lot of the story fell into place. One of the stories we'd been floating was a *Mission: Impossible*-style heist targeting an Alliance military facility. The original story idea was much more technically-based, involving all sorts of stolen pass-codes and access cards, but it became simplified and streamlined to allow for more character interaction.

Ultimately, the core of the heist became about Book and his role on the crew. In the original draft, there were still extra complications to the heist and Book's active participation was not part of the plan, but was a late-episode complication for the crew when Mal (who was originally supposed to pose as the military officer) gets the tar beaten out of him. In the final draft, the script was revised and streamlined so that Mal gets beaten up earlier and Book's involvement is not quite as forced.

At this point, it's important to mention my good buddy, Matt Engstrom. While I don't claim I can fill Joss Whedon's shoes, I guess I'm the closest thing this project's got. If that's true, then Matt, who came onboard in the last week or so before the airing of our first episode, is pretty much our Tim Minear. When I've been working too hard and compare myself to Mal, I

jokingly call him Zoe. Point is, I don't know that folks realize just how important a part of the crew Matt is, and how much work the guy does. My name is on a lot of the messages and announcements, while Matt is quietly working behind the scenes.

Matt joined our project when we were in the homestretch of "The Big Stick" and did a tremendous job of editing it and turning a big sprawling mess into a streamlined episode. The dynamic between Matt and me on this episode would serve as the future model for all episodes, which have both a writer and a story editor (referred to in Season Two as the director) to best get the episode into shape.

Back to Book, now... One of the first images I had in mind was that of Book sitting alone in his cabin, clutching an Alliance cap, and that was what fueled a lot of his interaction in the episode. We're putting Book in a place where he's forced to confront his darker side because of his actions to help the crew. When we see Book alone and isolated at the end of "The Big Stick" (an image that will later be mirrored with Mal, as his own isolation increases), we know that he's taking the first steps on the path that will lead him away from Serenity. The longer he stays on the ship, the more he'll be forced down a path he doesn't want to walk.

Interestingly, although Book is at the heart of the episode, when I first wrote the teaser, he wasn't in it at all. I wanted to introduce re-introduce the crew in a way that showed that all is pretty much right with the world, but there was no room for Book. One of the first changes that Matt suggested was actually starting with a brief scene with Book giving a sermon (which is also cover for the job that Mal is pulling) before introducing everyone else at the ship.

Have I mentioned that my episodes are better once Matt is done with 'em?

In addition to Haven, this episode introduces the character of Bennett "Ben" Hicks, who becomes one of the good folk of Haven, and who we'll see a bit more of next season. In, fact, he... Nah, that would be telling.

Like many of the other good folk of Haven, Ben owes a debt to the novelization of *Serenity*, which has a passing reference to Mal picking up a thief who wants to start a new life on Haven (in the novel, this is when Book gets off the ship, but we fudged things a bit for our continuity). Hicks began life as a possible romantic interest for River (not in this episode, but potentially down the road), but because of the techie connection, it seemed more logical for him to have a little crush on Kaylee.

I wanted to be very careful with Ben because, while he offers expertise that the crew needs and is clearly an important part of the heist, it was vital to make sure that we didn't mess with the crew dynamic too much. In some ways, I think Ben is sort of emblematic of our project: he's part of things, but doesn't rock the boat, just like we're not afraid to establish our own continuity, but always with the utmost love and respect for what came first.

One other thing I'd definitely like to comment on from the teaser is the dynamic between River and Jayne (which also makes a minor appearance in act four). Some folks think I was implying a romantic coupling there, but the idea was supposed to be that if Jayne and River can dance together, it shows just how right things are. If those two can dance together, everything is okay with the crew, right? Wasn't supposed to be anything more, but, hey, it was the first episode, and we learn a little bit with each one that we do.